

Weather and Climate Newsletter
March 20, 2008

Department of Water Resources Delta Initiatives
Current Water Supply
Next Snow Survey

Ecosystem decline, water supply unreliability, poor Delta water quality, flood risks, and State Water Project pumping cutbacks have combined to create a crisis in the Delta. The area has had 162 levee failures in the last 100 years. There is a 64% chance of a catastrophic failure due to an earthquake or storm in the next 50 years. Water deliveries are likely to be reduced by up to 30% this year as a result of a court order protecting Delta smelt.

Accordingly, DWR has announced the start of the public process to study the environmental impacts of a Delta conservation plan including alternative water conveyance, new statewide water conservation efforts, and emergency response preparedness.

- A public workshop on the environmental review process is scheduled for Monday, March 24 at 1:30pm in the Resources Building Auditorium at 1416 9th Street in Sacramento. At least four alternatives are being proposed, including no new Delta conveyance facility, dual conveyance as suggested by the Blue Ribbon Task Force's Delta Vision process, an isolated facility, a Delta improvements solution, as well as alternatives that may result from these analyses.

- Water conservation efforts are being discussed on Friday, March 21 as part of the California Water Plan Advisory Committee at the Doubletree Hotel, 2001 Point West Way in Sacramento.

- A public workshop on Delta Emergency Response will be held on April 10, 2008 from 4-6pm in Courtland, CA at the Courtland Auditorium, at 146 Primasing Avenue. In an effort to improve emergency flood response in case of a catastrophe, DWR is placing a quarter of a million tons of rock in strategic locations around the Delta. This rock is designed for large-scale water quality protection, and would be barged to necessary locations in the days following a major event. Additional scoping meetings on Delta Emergency Response will also be held over the coming months:

<http://www.water.ca.gov/news/newsreleases/2008/031708delta2.pdf>

- Last week the State Water Project was forced to make additional reductions in pumping due to increased salvage of adult smelt. Water transfers have already been impacted as a result of Judge Oliver Wanger's ruling. DWR will be drawing from San Luis Reservoir at least a month earlier than it normally would in order to meet demands.

For more on these critical Delta issues, please see the following link:

http://baydeltaoffice.water.ca.gov/sdb/bdcp/index_bdcp.cfm

The winter season seems to be coming to a halt here. While storms can and do occur of significance in March, they are less likely as the season wears on. If it were to stop precipitating (I'll explain why I didn't say 'stop raining' in a moment), we would be left with a well-below normal season. More specifically, the 8-Station Index that is used to track north-state mid to high elevation precipitation (whether it falls as rain or snow) would end at 65% of normal. We should be at about 39" of precip by now, but we have recorded about 33" since October 1, 2007. It's been a dry March with only 17% of a normal March having fallen so far. And only weak systems are forecast in the next 10 days by numerical weather prediction models. Look for a nice weekend, and then a cold front passage on Tuesday/ Wednesday, March 25/26.

While numbers sound discouraging about precip that occurred in the vicinity of Mt. Shasta to the Feather River basin, there were a number of very cold, very southerly storms this winter. So, contrary to the fairly low precip recorded, our snow pack, which is measured up and down the crest of the Sierra is still doing pretty good. According to snow sensor data, as of March 20, statewide average snowpack water equivalence stands at 100% of the April 1 average. Many snow sensors in the lower elevations are recording snow water equivalent depths well over their April 1 averages.

For graphical depictions of the northern, central, and southern Sierra snowpack data over this season, please go to:

http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/snow/PLOT_SWC

For detailed current snow pillow data:

<http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/iodir?s=page6>

It stayed fairly cold in early March, which helped retain some of that snowpack. Of course, runoff will get going in earnest soon due to higher sun elevation and longer days. The current Unimpaired Runoff rates in all major Sierra basins are well below their March averages, thanks to low snow levels during the winter storms. The projected median April-July runoff now ranges from 105%(Kaweah River) to 87%(Shasta Lake). Statewide, the March 18 forecast update is lower for all basins than the March 1, 2008 Bulletin 120 forecast:

<http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/iodir?s=b120up>

The next snow survey is set for Wednesday, March 26th.

A new daily statewide reservoir storage percentage estimate is available on CDEC (California Data Exchange Center):

<http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/reports/RES>

Scroll to the bottom of the report.

Today's summary:

Total Storage	14,221,990 acre feet
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Total Average Storage 17,362,608 acre feet
Total Statewide % Average for this date 82.35%

Thanks to our snow surveys and CDEC sections for this very nice data addition. It will provide mid-month estimates of storage, supplementing the more thorough 1st of the month reports available at:

<http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/reservoirs/STORAGE>

Please check the State Meteorologist website for monthly weather and hydrology summaries going back to May, 2006. These are very helpful reference materials, as they summarize rainfall, snowpack, reservoir storage and weather conditions. These are not the same as the newsletters, but are easily accessed and archived. February's is now posted:

<http://www.weather.water.ca.gov/summaries/>

Look for the next issuance of this newsletter in about two weeks. It becomes a monthly product in the summer.

(EL)

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